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## ELECTIVE STUDIES—WHERE? <sup>1</sup>

PERMIT me to say, by way of introductory explanation, that the subject, as printed on the programme, is hardly an exact statement of the subject which I was invited to discuss, or which I am to discuss.

The question of elective courses is not, at least in Michigan, an open one. Almost, if not quite all high schools, provide two or more courses from which the pupil may choose.

With the question of elective courses I shall deal, if at all, only incidentally. The topic I am to consider is that of optional or elective studies—not courses—in the high school, with special reference to the “where” of such options, providing they are offered at all.

But you will pardon me if, at the outset, I supplement what Principal Smith has so excellently said, with a few considerations on the larger and more fundamental question of the advisability of options—a question which is logically antecedent to the more restricted inquiry that has been set before me, and upon the answer to which must depend the very existence of my subject. For to deny the validity of the arguments for the use of options is to leave me and my question alike without a peg to stand upon. No options, no “where.”

Says a writer in the November number of the *Educational Review*, “It can have escaped no observant eye that a rational introduction of freedom into the high school is rapidly taking place. The growing appreciation of the practical and educational value of a large group of newer subjects renders it impossible longer to maintain a hard-and-fast course of study in the secondary schools. The elective system is gaining ground.”

And Superintendent Seaver of the Boston (Mass.) schools, in the October number of the same magazine, after speaking at some length on the development of high schools in Massachu-

<sup>1</sup> Paper read before the Michigan Schoolmasters' Club.

setts, and especially of the added functions which have been assigned them by reason of the increased recognition of the place and value of so-called non-classical studies, gives expression to the following views :

“What would most improve our present course of study in the high schools is a much larger use of options. Most of the studies now required should be made elective. From an authorized list of elective studies, the pupils should choose each year, under the advice of parents and teachers, those studies which appear best suited to their several needs.

“Certain studies considered to be absolutely essential might be required of all pupils alike ; but such studies would occupy a relatively small part of the time. The official course of study would then be a mere inventory of the studies authorized to be pursued in the high schools, each defined as to the amount of ground to be covered, the total allowance of time therefor, and the degree of proficiency to be reached therein as a condition of the pupil's receiving a certificate.” Mr. Seaver then goes on with a somewhat extended argument for the use of elective studies, which it would be well worth the while of those interested in the subject to read.

It occurred to me in the preliminary stages of preparing this paper that it would be of genuine interest to the club, and add greatly to the value of the discussion, to secure the views of some of our best known educators upon the question in hand. With this in mind I wrote to five or six of our most prominent workers, and obtained the replies which I now take pleasure in reading. The quality will, I think, compensate for any lack of quantity. The first is from Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler, editor of the *Educational Review*, and, while short, is to the point, and covers the question at stake.

The second letter is from the Hon. George B. Aiton, State Inspector of High Schools in Minnesota, whose address a year ago before this club we all remember with such pleasure.

The third is from Dean C. H. Thurber, of the Morgan Park Academy, editor of the *SCHOOL REVIEW*.

The fourth is from Principal W. H. Smiley, of the Denver

(Colo.) High School, one of the leading secondary schoolmen in the country.

The last is from Superintendent A. F. Nightingale, of Chicago, who writes in his usual vigorous and straightforward style.

In answer to your questions, I beg to say that I believe in a limited use of options in the high school. I may expand this answer sufficiently to say that what I have in mind is, not an option that would permit the student to destroy the symmetry of his secondary-school course by omitting some integral element of that course, such as language, or science, or history, but merely an option between languages, sciences, or topics or periods of historical study.

In answer to your second question I would say that these options may profitably extend, I think, throughout the whole secondary-school course. They may certainly be used to advantage in the latter half of it.

NICHOLAS MURRAY BUTLER

Generally speaking, optional *courses* are about all the latitude which can be allowed in schools of smaller size, and even then, the fewer the courses the better for the school in general. In fact, I do not see how optional subjects can be permitted unless the classes are large enough to section. The Central High School of Minneapolis has over four hundred freshmen; in such a body, optional subjects would create no embarrassment whatever. Generally speaking, secondary students are so immature, corps are so small, and optional courses afford so large a degree of freedom that optional subjects are not desirable. To us in Minnesota, at least, the question of optional subjects has at present no significance.

GEO. B. AITON

In general, I am in favor of options; I consider them desirable and practicable, but they must be carefully guarded, as the introduction of an elective system involves a vast amount of consultation on the part of the principal with the pupils, and often with the parents. We practically have that system here, and I know that the time given to consultation with students is greater than in most schools. Detailed opinions on the various points you make I do not feel like giving without more thought than the limited time now at my command permits.

CHAS. H. THURBER

Our school has a total enrollment thus far this year of about eight hundred and twenty-five. We offer but two courses, known as the "General" and "Classical" courses. The "General Course" provides for four years' instruction in each of four lines of work, viz., mathematics, science, history, and English, and languages (the choice being between Latin and Ger-

man). Those who desire (for example, those contemplating an "Advanced Scientific Course") may substitute French for history, English, or science in the third or fourth years; or French or Spanish for mathematics in the last two years; in the last year, those who can show good reason for the election may substitute a year in biology (full laboratory work) for the geology and astronomy which are the usual fourth year subjects in the "General Course." Those who expect to prepare for college, although the subjects for all pupils are in the main the same during the first year, may take German and Latin instead of the elementary zoölogy and botany of the first year. The purpose of this permission is to secure for those who must have a modern language in addition to Latin and Greek, a year more of preparation than is secured by taking up French in the third year. It should be remembered that in this district is a thoroughly equipped manual training high school with a three years' course (students may take an additional year if they desire); and all graduates of the eighth grade have free election between that school and this. The enrollment in the lowest class there is one hundred and fifty; here, two hundred and eighty. The only options allowed are as follows: First year, Latin or German; second year, English or Latin, or German; third year, English or Latin, or German or French in place of mathematics.

Our "Classical" course prepares for Harvard or Yale, and differs little from the usual method pursued.

Our programme is probably more conservative in the matter of options than most schools of its size, *and I shall advocate an extension of such liberty when I can secure the additional teachers that such extension would render necessary.* We have four years of one subject known as History and English. Roughly speaking, it consists of half a year each of History and English. I should like to see history stand side by side with English for the last three years (each study being given four periods per week, and continued for the full year). A full year in political economy should be offered. If such courses could be offered then I believe there should be large freedom of election; some would take more of history, some of English, some of science, and I think there would be stronger work in each subject.

WM. H. SMILEY

I should be very much surprised and alarmed to know that most of the larger high schools have not adopted options in the high-school course. I do not mean options between courses, but options in studies. About one-half of the work in the Chicago high schools is required; the other half is open to selection by the pupils. I inclose you our course of study. You will see that full work is twenty hours per week. In the first year twenty-four hours are given; the second year, thirty-four hours; third year, thirty-eight hours; fourth year, forty hours. Since in each year but twenty hours are required for the full course, you will at once observe that there are many options. You will notice also that we have but one course of study, and the

pupils differentiate according to their purposes. If they are going to college, they must meet the requirements of the college they expect to enter. If they are not going, they have a very large choice. On pages 21 and 22 you will see what we absolutely require for graduation. Of course, the small high schools may not be able to have more than one course, and pupils may be required to take it, where, if the school is large enough and the people wise enough to give parents an opportunity of selecting for their children, it certainly ought to be done. In Chicago we shall have more rather than fewer options.

I am an ardent advocate of classical study, but I am thoroughly convinced of the true statement that "what is one man's meat is another man's poison," and, since the high schools are the schools of the people, we must aim to accommodate the people within the lengths of all reasonable demands.

A. F. NIGHTINGALE

I had hoped to secure a letter also from Professor Hanus, of Harvard, but, as he is in Europe, it was not possible to hear from him before the meeting of this club.

In an effort to give the discussion a practical and definite turn, and to present in a concrete form the question of "Where" such options may advantageously appear in a high-school programme, I have outlined a course with large options, designed to prepare for the University of Michigan in particular, and as well to offer such additional and optional studies as may serve as a suitable preparation for life in case the student is unable to enter college. As by far the larger proportion of high-school pupils are included in this last category, I am sure I need offer no apologies for having an eye to their interests and good.

#### A PROPOSED HIGH-SCHOOL COURSE WITH OPTIONS

		FIRST YEAR	
		STUDIES	
PRESCRIBED		ELECTIVE	
<i>First Half-Year</i>		Hours per week	
El. algebra and geometry, - -		5	
English {	Grammar, - -	2	Latin, German, or French, - - 5
	Essays, reading, etc., - 2		Physical geography—½ year, 5
<i>Second Half-Year</i>			Physiology—½ year, - - - 5
Algebra, - - - - -		5	Commercial arithmetic and business correspondence, - - 5
Botany, - - - - -		5	
English, - - - - -		2	

## SECOND YEAR

STUDIES									
PRESCRIBED					ELECTIVE				
<i>First Half-Year</i>					Hours per week				
Algebra,	-	-	-	- 5	Latin, German, or French,	-	-	- 5	
History—Greek and Roman,	-			4	Zoölogy—½ year,	-	-	- 5	
English,	-	-	-	- 3	Bookkeeping,	-	-	- 5	
					American history,	-	-	- 5	
<i>Second Half-Year</i>									
Physics,	-	-	-	- 5					
History—Mediæval and modern,				4					
English,	-	-	-	- 3					

## THIRD YEAR

STUDIES									
PRESCRIBED					ELECTIVE				
<i>First Half-Year</i>					Hours per week				
Physics,	-	-	-	- 5	Latin, Greek, German, or French,	-	-	-	5
English,	-	-	-	- 3	English history,	-	-	-	5
					Astronomy—½ year,	-	-	-	5
					Geology—½ year,	-	-	-	5
					Civil government—½ year,	-	-	-	5
<i>Second Half-Year</i>									
Geometry,	-	-	-	- 5	English literature,	-	-	-	5
English,	-	-	-	- 3					

## FOURTH YEAR

STUDIES									
PRESCRIBED					ELECTIVE				
<i>First Half-Year</i>					<i>Hours per week</i>				
<i>Hours per week</i>									
Geometry,	-	-	-	-	5	Latin, Greek, German, or French,			5
English,	-	-	-	-	3	Chemistry,			5
						Political economy—½ year,			5
						Psychology—½ year,			5
<i>Second Half-Year</i>									
English,	-	-	-	-	3	Trigonometry—½ year,			5
						Reviews,			5

## NOTES ON THE PROPOSED HIGH-SCHOOL COURSE

1. In case the grammar grades give thorough preparation in English grammar, it may not be necessary to use the two hours given to that subject. Physical geography may very well be required, under the circumstances, to fill up the requisite number of hours. Although there are but nine (9) hours of prescribed work in the first half of this grade, apparently allowing two (2) elections, it is not so designed. The transition from the grammar grade to the high school is so trying to many pupils that it is thought fourteen (14) hours should be all that are required.

2. In case a college or university makes chemistry instead of botany the second required science, as many colleges do, botany may be placed in the list of electives of the first year, and chemistry be put in the prescribed list, beginning with the second half of the third year, or the first half of the fourth.

3. Wherever it is found necessary to give more than two years to the preparatory work in Greek, that option may be allowed in the second half of the second year.

4. Where French and German can be taught for two years only, the language options will have to be lessened, unless beginning classes be again allowed at the beginning of the third year.

In preparing this I took the four groups of admission requirements as published in the last calendar of the university and selected the studies common to all four groups. I found these to be English, presumably continuing through the whole four years; history, one year's work; mathematics, including a year each of algebra and geometry; science, including a year of physics and a half year of botany; and finally, as the minimum requirement, two years of work in some foreign language. As there is really an option, however, in this last requirement—the pupil having a choice as between Latin, French, German and Greek—and, as there are many pupils not preparing for college of whom no foreign language requirement is demanded, the only branches placed in the prescribed column are English, history, mathematics and science, to the extent outlined above. The work in these four lines is to be done by all, whether preparing for college or not.

From the large range of studies presented in the elective column, a sufficient number must be chosen to answer the requirements for graduation, viz., a total of 137 hours of recitation work, divided as follows: First year, 31 hours; second year, 34 hours; third year, 36 hours; fourth year, 36 hours.

That the proposed course gives all, or nearly all, that should be absolutely imposed upon the pupil is, we believe, clearly demonstrable. In the insistence upon the study of English for an average of three periods a week for the four years, we are exacting from the pupil only the tribute due to his mother tongue; a tribute, we are sure, of which all will admit the jus-



tice and which all will willingly pay. No pupil should be graduated from the halls of the high school who has not formed some measure of acquaintanceship with the great thinkers of our race and some appreciation of the beauties of his own literature, and gained some even inadequate conception of the untold wealth that lies at his feet. No justification will be demanded, and no apology will be necessary, therefore, for the insertion of the study of English among the indispensable concomitants of a high-school education.

As to mathematics there may not be quite the unanimity of opinion that there is as to the place of English, but still the vast majority of educators will, I believe, be found to defend its claim to an undisputed position in the properly constructed curriculum, and to question the disciplinary and educational value of the course which fails to prescribe it. It still holds an unrivaled place among the studies designed to cultivate the power of logical and exact reasoning, and we doubt much whether any education is adequate to the end in view which shifts it from its honored position.

It is true that the general course which Principal Goodwin, of Newton, Mass., describes in the *Educational Review* for February 1893, does not include mathematics among the required studies; but to that extent, I must hold, his course is deficient and open to the criticism which opponents of the optional system will be only too quick to bring, viz., that its tendency is to lower the educational standard.

As to science there will probably be little, if any, criticism upon the claims which it advances for some measure of recognition as a prescribed study. The fact that a year and a half of science work appears in all four admission groups is sufficient evidence of a recognition of its rights. It may be an open question whether the elements of chemistry is not the second science to be insisted upon and demanded of the properly trained pupil; but that is a question which scientific experts must settle among themselves, and it is not in me to be so rash as to venture where angels fear to tread. That point, however, is a secondary one and has no direct bearing upon the legitimacy of

the claims for *some* scientific study on the part of the would-be graduate. The marvelous achievements of science in the past fifty years; its contributions to the well-being of mankind; its wonderful possibilities; its educative and disciplinary value—when properly taught and studied—all these furnish abundant reasons why science should have a prescribed place in the secondary-school course.

As to history—the story of the progress of the race—who would omit it from any well constructed or rightly balanced course? Indeed, I may be criticised for not placing American history in the list of prescribed studies, but my excuse is, first, that it is not one of the branches common to the four groups of admission requirements, and, second, that it should be taught in the grammar grades, and therefore, need only be given in the high school to those who wish to study the subject somewhat more fully and carefully.

The case for prescribed studies is in, and while no detailed argument has been offered or attempted by way of justifying their presence, enough has been said, I trust, to indicate the main ground for their right to the claim of prescribed studies. I fear less criticism along the line of the prescribed studies than I do regarding the position of some studies placed in the optional or elective column.

It may be asked why the language requirement is not placed in the prescribed column so that all students, whether preparing for the university or not, should have some linguistic training. Of course all pupils looking forward to a college course will take at least two years of foreign language work. The question is, shall those who have no hope of going to college be required to take a corresponding amount of Latin, German or French before they are allowed to graduate? On this point I am inclined to grant some liberty of choice, and, in spite of a vivid appreciation of the value of the study of a foreign tongue, to hold that it is better to give some freedom along this line than to lose the pupil altogether from the school. This is the attitude in effect of all schools that offer a so-called English or commercial course, so that no strange doctrine is here advanced.

There are many pupils in a high school to whom linguistic work of any kind is hopelessly difficult and depressingly discouraging, and whether they might not better be given such food as is attuned to their mental stomachs than to lose altogether what a high-school education may give is a very serious question, and not to be answered too airily. For myself I am inclined to err—if it is to err—on the safe side, and to give, by every reasonable concession, the benefits of a high-school education to all who will avail themselves of it. Given a well-equipped high school and a progressive and inspiring corps of teachers—yes, give only the live and cultured teacher and no study will be without value and no pupil will pass from his influence without receiving an unmeasured store of good—inspiration, tastes, habits that may enrich a lifetime. In a land where educated and trained citizenship is of such transcendent importance; in a land whose very existence depends upon the intelligence and sober-mindedness of its citizens; in a land where thousands upon thousands of our fellow-citizens have attained success and vigorous mentality, let us not be too insistent upon this or that specific branch of study, but let us rather do all that is reasonable in broadening the horizon, deepening the culture, strengthening the intellect and ennobling the ideas of as many as we can bring within the reach of our influence.

J. H. HARRIS